DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 074 092 TM 002 455

AUTHOR	Kunkel, Richard C.; And Others
TITLE	School Related Alienation: Perceptions of Secondary School Students.
PUB DATE	Feb 73
NOTE	21p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (57th, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 25-March 1, 1973)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Evaluation Methods; *High School Students; Questionnaires; Secondary Grades; Speeches; *Student Alienation; *Student Attitudes; *Student School Relationship

ABSTRACT

Responses to questionnaires administered to 10,000 senior high school students to ascertain their feelings of alienation as related to their schools are presented. The questionnaire items concerned: School as an Institution, The School as Teacher, Authority--Autonomy, and Parental Interest in School. The findings that resulted from the questionnaire returns included the following: (1) over half of the students either saw little relationship between what they learn in school and life outside school or find school experience contradictory to out-of-school learning; (2) two students in five stated they were working below their ability in school; they missed one or more days of school because they did not want to come; they saw teachers doing the planning and telling students what to do; and they did not remember a teacher compliment; (3) one student in three judged school content as missing the important community problems; (4) one student in four saw school regulations as too strict, and believed that someone or something prevents him from achieving in school; (5) one in five had no pride in any school experience; saw school content missing the important problems of the country; would like to stay away from school on many days; was dissatisfied with his treatment by teachers; had trouble pleasing teachers; and never talked with his parents regarding school or school work; (6) one in six found school no aid in answering personal problems and questions; (7) one i seven did not know what value his parents placed on school learning; and (8) one in 14 would quit school if possible. (For questionnaire, see TM 002 456.) (DB)

ED 074092

TM 002 456
002 456

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SCHOOL RELATED ALIENATION:

PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Richard C. Kunkel
Department of Education
Saint Louis University

Jay C. Thompson
Area of Curriculum and Instruction
Ball State University

James H. McElhinney
Area of Curriculum and Instruction
Ball State University

Paper presented at American Educational Research Association
57th Annual Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 25--March 1,
1973

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

SCHOOL RELATED ALIENATION: PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Richard C. Kunkel	Saint Louis University
Jay C. Thompson	Ball State University
James H. McElhinney	Ball State University

Introduction

Data for this study on school-related alienation are taken from questionnaire returns from approximately 10,600 senior high students attending twelve high schools in eleven districts in northwest Indiana, suburban to Chicago, Gary, and Hammond.

The questionnaires, administered to the responding students in January, 1971, were developed by the authors as part of a general school curriculum evaluation provided by the Area of Curriculum and Instruction, Ball State University, and in cooperation with eleven member school districts of the Northwest Indiana School Study Council which volunteered to participate.

Definition of Alienation

For purposes of this study, the questionnaire items contributing to a definition of alienation are: (1) absence of control over own life, i.e., the lack of student autonomy; (2) unequal chances to succeed; (3) absence of pride in school accomplishments; (4) school content as irrelevant to their lives outside school; (5) willful school absence; (6) absence of an understanding teacher; (7) absence of parental verbal interest in school; and (8) authoritarian school regulations.

Brief Description of the Schools

The schools in this study vary in many respects. Some of the buildings are among the newest and most adequate in Indiana, and some have been standing for three-quarters of a century. Some of the schools' student populations are mostly white, a few are over half black and/or Spanish-speaking. With one exception, each district has one high school which serves all public school students in the district. Some districts have generous tax bases due to large industries inside their boundaries; some must depend on a property tax base consisting mostly of modest homes. Some districts which have considered themselves adequately financed in the past are now in financial difficulty.

Brief Description of the Communities

The communities in which these students reside, in addition to sharing the same general geographic location in northwest Indiana, have some other characteristics in common. In all of the communities the majority of male adults are employed in industry. Some communities have a minority of people in the professions in others the number of persons in professions is limited. The median family income in these communities is much above average for the State, although unemployment in the area has increased since the data were collected.

Units of single family dwellings are the dominant housing pattern although the desirability of location and selling price of houses may vary widely among the communities. In some communities, the homes are new and surrounded by adequate lawns, and in other

communities homes are 75 years old and crowded. Smog is a common problem, but much more severe in some communities than others.

People live in ethnic groups in many of these communities and some of these ethnic communities have existed for 75 years, while others are just now being formed.

Some of the communities are old established ones with municipal governments, churches, businesses, political and social services which have existed for long periods of time. Even these established communities are of two kinds: (1) some, whose population saturated the available land area several years ago, have remained fairly constant in total numbers; and (2) others, with considerable unoccupied land area available, have people building new homes in large numbers in the established community. A third community pattern also exists. In the formerly rural areas outside established communities, housing density has increased and relatively new communities have been formed, often with community social, political, business, and economic services scantily or unevenly provided. Such areas often have little feeling of community identity or sense of community responsibility.

Methods and Terminology in Reporting Data

The populations of the high schools vary from 500 to 1,675 pupils. For purposes of reporting data, each school is considered as a unit, and data are given as percentage of students in the median school that chose a particular response from a questionnaire item. Specific data, given in percentages, include the range, the median, and sometimes first and third quartiles. These are determined for each

response in each item and the school at the top, bottom or at any other point varies from response to response.[1] When percentages from two or more responses are combined, percents for the same school are added and the sums are ranked.

The model used in this study is based on a theory of evaluation that curriculum is what students perceive is happening to them because they attend school. The methodology employed in this study is a process that attempts to view the school as an institution. Therefore, the evaluation is based on the description of what pupils, teachers, and other personnel judge is happening in the schools. In many cases this evaluation model reports educational outcomes that have not developed from planned instruction on the part of the school, but result from unexamined behavior of teachers, administrators, and pupils. The concept of school-related alienation is one that will serve to illustrate such an outcome. The responses of the students which produced a unique pattern for each school suggest that the immediate school environment is a contributing factor to the amount of alienation. This data does not represent a limited or identifiable group of students in these schools, but does report the perceptions of the entire population of students in the twelve buildings.

School as an Institution

School absence sometimes reflects attitudes and perceptions of students. To measure possible school-related alienation patterns

[1]Data are given in percents by item and by response in the Appendix.

one statement to which students responded was, "The thing which I do in school that I am most proud of is . . ." Then four activities were listed. In the median school nineteen percent of the students selected a fifth alternative, "Nothing that I do in school makes me proud." The range, by building, was from nine percent through twenty-eight percent of the people who judged that there was nothing in school that could serve as a source of pride.

Another item gathered pupils' judgments concerning the value of their school work. Three of the responses offered were classified as favorable. The fourth response stated, "I think about one-fourth of the school work I do is valuable." Thirteen percent in the median building chose this response. The fifth response allowed that "almost none" of the school work done was valuable. Nine percent of the students in the median school selected this response. The range was from five percent to thirteen percent in these buildings. In the median building almost a fourth of the pupils judged that only one-fourth or less of their work was of value.

Another item asked pupils to compare and contrast the content of their schooling to what they learned and observed outside of school. The first response was favorable. The second response stated, "School has little relationship to life outside of school." Thirty-two percent of the students in the median school chose this response. The range varied from a low of twenty-six percent in one building to a high of forty-two percent in another building. In the same item, and thus in competition with that already reported, was the following alternative; "Much of what I hear in school is contradictory to what I see and hear outside of school." In the

median building twenty-five percent of the students selected this alternative as descriptive of their judgment. The range was from eighteen percent to thirty-three percent. In sum, for this item, almost one-third of the students in the median building see school as having little relationship to life outside of school and another one-fourth of the students view school as contradictory to life outside of school.

One item asked, "If I were to list the five or six most important questions I have about my life, and then examine what I am learning in school, I would find that the school is providing me with help in examining possible answers to . . ." In the median building, eighteen percent chose the alternative, "School experiences seem to miss my important questions."

When students were asked to define the most important problems their communities faced and to examine what they were learning in school, would their school experiences help them find possible solutions to such problems? Thirty-three percent of the students in the median school chose the statement, "School experiences seem to miss my community's important problems." The inter-quartile range was from twenty-five to thirty-five percent.

A third item asked pupils to examine the most important problems the United States faces and what is being learned in school. Twenty-one percent of the students judged school experiences missed dealing with the United States' important problems. The range varied by building from a low of eleven percent to a high of thirty-three percent.

When asked to judge the degree to which students used their ability in school, forty-four percent of those in the median school responded that they were working below their ability. The inter-quartile range for students judging they were working below ability was from thirty-eight percent to fifty percent.

Twelve percent of the students in the median school replied in another item that they did not spend anytime on school work outside of school time each day. Another item asked, "Do you usually have your school work finished on time?" Two of the responses were positive, and three, negative. Fourteen percent of the students in the median school responded "sometimes;" four percent responded "seldom;" and one percent responded "never."

Another item attempted to assess students' enthusiasm for school attendance. Response four stated, "Many days I would like to stay away." Twenty-one percent of those in the median school selected this alternative. The inter-quartile range for this response was from five percent to nine percent.

"If something happened and you had to stop school now, how would you feel?" Five percent of the students in the median school selected "Very happy, I'd like to quit."

Another item gave students an opportunity to report if they had stayed away from school just because they didn't want to attend. The first negative alternative for this was that they stayed away "one or two days during the past year." In the median building twenty-seven percent said they had decided to stay away one or two days "just because they didn't want to come." Another alternative,

ten percent of the pupils in the median school indicated they chose to stay away from three to six days just because they didn't want to attend." A third alternative was staying out of school for seven to fifteen days because they did not want to attend. In the median building four percent chose this response. The inter-quartile range for this response was from two percent to five percent. The fourth alternative asked if students stayed away from school for sixteen days or more during the past school year just because they did not want to come. Five percent of those in the median school selected this alternative. The inter-quartile range for this response varied from three percent to six percent. When the percentages of these four responses are added, forty-five percent of the students in the median school missed at least one day of school last year because they "just didn't want to come." The inter-quartile range was thirty-nine percent to fifty percent. The students in the lowest individual building of the twelve high schools had a response of thirty-one percent to these alternatives; in the highest individual building, fifty-three percent of the students selected one of these alternatives.

The School as Teacher

Students were asked in another item whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the way they were treated by teachers and other school officials. Twenty-two percent of the students in the median school responded they were "dissatisfied" or "very much dissatisfied" with the way they were treated. The inter-quartile range was from eighteen percent to twenty-four percent.

An item asked "how well do you think you get along with your

teachers?" The third response to this question stated, "I sometimes have trouble pleasing teachers." Seventeen percent of those in the median school judged this to be their perception. Four percent of the students in the median building indicated, "I never seem to be able to please teachers." "I am not interested in pleasing teachers," was the choice of nineteen percent of the students in the median building.

In one item students were asked, "How often do teachers compliment you concerning some phase of your school work?" One of the five responses was, "I don't remember that a teacher has complimented me for school work." In the median building, fifteen percent of the pupils judged this to be their best choice. Another response that may have negative implications or may allow pupils to avoid the question was, "Teachers give grades rather than compliments." Twenty-eight percent of the students in the median building selected this response. The inter-quartile range for this response was from twenty-five percent to twenty-nine percent.

Authority--Autonomy

"In my classes the last two or three years, I find that teachers do most of the planning and tell pupils what to do," judge forty-four percent of the pupils in the median building. In the building with the lowest choice of this response, two out of five pupils judged that teachers planned and told students what to do.

When asked about the last time the high school principal spoke to them, seventeen percent of the students in the median building chose the statement that the principal spoke to them to "remind them

of a school regulation." The range on this item varied from eight percent in one building to twenty-six percent in another.

Regarding the enforcement of school regulations so that learning and instruction can occur, seventeen percent of the students in the median building judged the enforcement as too strict. An additional ten percent selected the response "much too strict." The combined responses of "too strict" and "much too strict" range from sixteen percent to sixty-one percent in the twelve buildings, the median being twenty-six percent.

Another item stated, "Every time I try to get ahead, something or someone stops me." Twenty-eight percent of the pupils in the median building agreed with the statement. An additional thirty-nine percent in the median school were not sure whether this was true.

Parental Interest in School

"How often do you and your parents talk about your school work?" Twenty percent of the students in the median building responded "never, or hardly ever." The range on this response in the twelve buildings varied from seventeen percent to thirty-three percent.

When asked concerning the value parents placed on what was being learned in school, thirteen percent chose the response that stated, "I don't know what my parents think about the value of my school work."

Another item asked students to check the statement which was closest to stating the relationship with their parents and doing well in school. "My parents don't seem to be much concerned about how I do in school," judged five percent of the students in the

median school. Responses on this item ranged from a low of three percent to a high of nine percent.

Students were also asked to check the statement that was closest to their parents' judgments about the amount of time students spent on school work. Twenty-five percent of the students in the median building did not know how their parents feel about the amount of time pupils spent upon school work.

Summary

High school students in the median building of the twelve schools studied in the Northwest Indiana School Study Council report varied in levels of alienation, but evidence of alienation exists in each building. Based upon questionnaire returns from these 10,000 students the following findings concerning alienation of high school students emerge:

Over half of the students either saw little relationship between what they learn in school and life outside, or find school experience contradictory to out-of-school learning.

Two students in five stated they were working below their ability in school; they missed one or more days of school just because they did not want to come; they saw teachers doing the planning and telling students what to do; and they did not remember a teacher compliment.

One student in three judged school content as missing the important community problems.

One student in four saw school regulations as too strict; and believed that someone or something stops him from getting ahead

in school.

One student in five had no source of pride in any school experience; saw school content missing the important problems of the United States; would like to stay away from school on many days because he did not want to attend; was dissatisfied with his treatment by teachers; had trouble pleasing teachers; and never talked to his parents regarding school or school work.

One student in six judged school content to miss personal problems and questions he had; and had difficulty in completing school work on time.

One student in seven did not know the value his parents placed upon what was learned in school.

One student in ten saw none of his school work as valuable, and did no homework outside of school.

One student in fourteen would quit school if it were possible.

One student in twenty judged that his parents did not care how he did in school.

Implications

There are possible modifications in school practices in many of the reported situations which might reduce the student's sense of alienation. Meaningful tasks at which the student could succeed should be arranged. Such tasks might be organized by pupils and the success in these tasks might become sources of pride for pupils.

Instructional content should be examined for congruence with out-of-school experiences of pupils; and, also, out-of school

experiences should be systematically examined as definitions concerning "reality" are developed. Pupils should be directly involved in this process.

Schools should examine their regulations and faculty-staff behavior patterns to eliminate situations in which students are victimized by the institution. Study activities focusing upon conflicting positions in the culture could be examined in ways which might help students to deal with the conficts of human existence instead of simply reacting with despair. Schools should enable students to accept a meaningful role in the major decisions which affect them. Teachers should systematically attempt to offer genuine compliments to pupils.

Pupils should be encouraged by the school to dialogue with their parents regarding school and the relationships of the students, schools, and parents.

Homework, i.e., out of school time schoolwork, should be made significant and some should be eliminated, especially that which students consider "busy work."

In summary, it appears that schools could examin and possibly modify processes, content, and personal relationships that presently seem to alienate significant numbers of students, and thereby better serve students who experience this alienation.

APPENDIX

ED 074093

TM 002 456

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS SOLICITING SCHOOL RELATED ALIENATION FROM 10,000 SENIOR HIGH PUPILS

Only the responses for which data are reported were utilized. Twelve buildings supplied data. Data are reported for the buildings at the First Quartile, the Median, the Third Quartile, and the Range.

	1st Quartile	Median	3rd Quartile	Range
1. In general, how well do you like your school?				
1. I like it very much.				
2. I like it.				
3. Neither like nor dislike.				
4. Many days I would kike to stay away.	18%	21%	24%	10-31%
5. If I could, I would quit school.	5%	8%	9%	3-10%
2. If something happened and you had to stop school now, how would you feel?				
1. Very happy--I'd like to quit.	5%	5%	6%	3- 9%
2. I wouldn't care one way or another				
3. I would be disappointed.				
4. I would try hard to continue.				
5. I would do almost anything to stay in school.				
3. During the past school year, did you ever stay away from school just because you didn't want to come?				
1. No.				
2. Yes, for 1 or 2 days.	23%	27%	29%	19-33%
3. Yes, for 3 to 6 days.	8%	10%	11%	6-14%
4. Yes, for 7 to 15 days.	2%	4%	5%	1- 5%
5. Yes, for 16 days or more.	3%	5%	6%	1-12%
TOTALS	39%	45%	50%	31-53%
4. During the last two or three years, it seems to me that:				
1. School is much more directly related to life outside of school.				
2. School has little relationship to life outside of school.	27%	32%	37%	26-42%
3. Much of what I hear in school is contradictory to what I see and hear outside of school.	21%	25%	29%	18-33%

	1st Quartile	Median	3rd Quartile	Range
5. If I were to list the five or six most important questions I have about my life, and then examined what I am learning in school, I would find that the school is providing me with help in examining possible answers to: 1. Most of the important questions in my life. 2. About half of my important questions. 3. One or two of my important questions 4. School experiences seem to miss my important questions. 5. I am not able to judge	14%	18%	21%	9-27%
6. If I were to list the five or six most important problems that this community faces and then looked at what I am learning in school, I would find that school is helping me to examine possible approaches to: 1. Most of the important problems in this community. 2. About half of the community's important problems. 3. One or two of the community's important problems. 4. School experiences seem to miss the community's important problems. 5. I am not able to judge.	25%	33%	35%	20-49%
7. If I were to list the five or six most important problems that the United States faces and then looked at what I am learning in school, I would find that the school is helping me to examine possible approaches to: 1. Most of the important problems of the United States. 2. About half of the United States' important problems. 3. One or two of the United States' important problems. 4. School experiences seem to miss the United States' important problems 5. I am not able to judge	17%	21%	25%	11-33%

	1st Quartile	Median	3rd Quartile	Range
8. If you were to judge the degree to which you are using your ability in school what rating would you give?				
1. Above my ability				
2. Equal to my ability				
3. Below my ability	38%	44%	50%	22-54%
9. How much time do you usually spend on school work outside of school each day?				
1. None at all	10%	12%	17%	5-22%
2. On the average, less than one-half hour				
3. About one hour				
4. Between one and two hours				
5. More than two hours				
10. Do you have your school work finished on time?				
1. Always				
2. Usually				
3. Sometimes	11%	14%	18%	10-19%
4. Seldom	3%	4%	5%	2- 6%
5. Never	1%	1%	4%	0- 5%
11. Concerning the value of the things I do as school work:				
1. I think almost all of the schoolwork I do is valuable				
2. I think about 3/4 of the school work I do is valuable				
3. I think about 1/2 of the school work I do is valuable				
4. I think about 1/4 of the school work I do is valuable	8%	13%	14%	6-19%
5. I think almost none of the school work I do is valuable	5%	9%	10%	5-13%
12. The thing which I do in school that I am most proud of is:				
1. Being neat and prompt in my work				
2. Helping the teacher in the classroom				
3. Getting good grades on my report card				
4. Being well liked by all the students				
5. Nothing that I do in school makes me proud	14%	19%	23%	9-28%

	1st Quartile	Median	3rd Quartile	Range
13. In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way you are treated by teachers and other school officials?				
1. Very well satisfied				
2. Satisfied				
3. Half and half--neither satisfied nor dissatisfied				
4. Dissatisfied				
5. very much dissatisfied	18%	22%	24%	12-31%
14. How well do you think you get along with your teachers?				
1. I almost always please my teachers				
2. I usually succeed in pleasing them				
3. I sometimes have trouble pleasing teachers	16%	17%	18%	14-20%
4. I never seem to be able to please teachers	2%	4%	5%	1- 6%
5. I am not interested in pleasing teachers	16%	19%	23%	14-28%
15. In my classes the last two or three years, I find that:				
1. Teachers allow pupils to participate extensively in planning what to do.				
2. Teachers occasionally ask pupils for their opinion when planning what to do				
3. Teachers do most of the planning and tell pupils what to do	43%	44%	51%	41-57%
16. How often do teachers compliment you concerning some phase of your school work?				
1. Almost every day				
2. About once a week				
3. About once a semester				
4. I don't remember that a teacher has complimented me for school work	13%	15%	16%	10-19%
5. Teachers give grades rather than compliments	25%	28%	29%	16-38%

	1st Quartile	Median	3rd Quartile	Range
17. The last time the high school principal spoke to me was to: 1. Compliment me for an achievement 2. Remind me of a school regulation 3. To inquire about how I was getting along in school 4. None of these 5. The school principal has never spoken directly to me	11%	17%	19%	8-26%
18. As this school enforces regulations so that learning and instruction can occur, I think the enforcement is 1. About right 2. Too weak 3. Much too weak 4. Too strict	13%	17%	22%	11-35%
5. Much too strict	7%	10%	13%	4-26%
TOTALS	21%	26%	34%	16-61%
19. Every time I try to get ahead, something or someone stops me. 1. Agree	25%	28%	30%	21-33%
2. Not sure	36%	39%	40%	34-45%
3. Disagree				
20. How often do you and your parents talk about your school work? 1. Just about every day 2. Once or twice a week 3. Once or twice a month 4. Never, or hardly ever	19%	20%	26%	17-33%
21. Concerning the value my parents place on what I learn in school: 1. My parents think almost all that I learn in school is valuable 2. My parents think about 3/4 of of what I learn in school is valuable 3. My parents think 1/2 of what I learn in school is valuable 4. My parents think 1/4 of what I learn in school is valuable 5. My parents think almost none of what I learn in school is valuable 6. I don't know what my parents think about the value of my school work	12%	13%	16%	9-17%

	1st Quartile	Median	3rd Quartile	Range
22. Check the statement which comes closest to stating the relationship with your parents and doing well in school.				
1. My parents are interested in how well I do in school, but I don't feel that they are putting pressure on me.				
2. My parents are concerned about how well I do in school and sometimes feel pressure to do well.				
3. My parents often pressure me to do well in school				
4. My parents are constantly pressuring me to do well in school				
5. My parents don't seem to be much concerned about how I do in school	4%	5%	7%	3- 9%
23. Check the statement that comes closest to your parent's judgment about the amount of time you spend on school work.				
1. I don't know how my parents feel about the amount of time I spend on school work	23%	25%	28%	17-28%
2. My parents think that I spend about the right amount of time on school work				
3. My parents think I spend too much time on school work				
4. My parents think I spend too little time on school work				